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ABSTRACT

This paper states that a major challenge in preparing future educators is preparing them to teach their specific content areas while recognizing how curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with the state standards. Some recommendations for accomplishing these ends are to have teachers in training: (1) recognize that the content standards, as developed by states in most major subject areas, describe what K-12 students should be able to accomplish; (2) communicate the importance of standards (which can be learned by examining model school districts and reading state standards); (3) experience ways to apply the standards; (4) become confident in the usage of standards (by participating in group discussions and required projects); and (5) recognize how to evaluate student progress in a standards-based approach (understanding the connections of curriculum, instruction, and assessment while incorporating standards). (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Preparing Preservice Teachers to Use Educational Standards

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Preparing Preservice Teachers to Use Educational Standards

Educational standards continue to be the systemic reform called for in teaching and learning. Educational standards are defined as "requiring a certain body of knowledge and skills to be required by all offers equal opportunity to every child to succeed, to prosper, and to pursue their own individual happiness within the laws of the United States and their own prospective states..." (Saxe, 2000, p. 9). A challenge opens to the most effective ways to prepare preservice teachers about their state's educational standards. The challenge in preparing future educators is to have them prepared to teach their specific content areas while recognizing how curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with the state standards. Some recommendations for accomplishing these ends are to have teachers in training: (1) recognize the development of the standards movement, (2) communicate the importance of standards, (3) experience ways to apply the standards, (4) become confident in the usage of standards, and (5) recognize how to evaluate student progress in a standards-based approach.

The Development of the Standards Movement

Most preservice teachers will have had limited or no experience with the term standards. It may be difficult for them to envision the proper usage of standards for teaching in a basic education classroom without a cognitive knowledge base and/or firsthand experiences. This begins by imparting to preservice teachers a conceptual understanding of the term "standards" by showing how the political and social occurrences of the times surrounded the standards development. Preservice teachers need to have a conceptual understanding of the reform movement and how *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, was the catalyst for the modern standards movement. Teachers-in-training need to be aware of how national associations and

university content specialists began to examine curricular patterns and attempted to establish baselines in given subject areas...while state departments and public schools were developing their own curricula. Future teachers need to recognize how the standards for any state challenge them to improve the educational system. It is critical for preservice teachers to have a historical perspective of the educational reform environment from the national to their individual state, and how the experts approached the standards implementation in regards to philosophy, theory, and pedagogy. When preservice teachers are aware of how the standards were adopted and evolved into documents, significant and positive changes will occur in regards to the consciousness of standards. Only when a cognitive knowledge base is established will preservice teachers recognize how the standards were developed with the purpose for improving education by "celebrating student learning" (Carr & Harris, 2001, p 156).

Communicate the Importance of Standards

Communicating the standards begins by having teachers-in-training examine model school districts that show how a standards-based curriculum is designed for implementation. Examining the incremental process for a K-12 perspective will outline grade levels, subjects, criterion statements, and assessment activities. From this examination process, preservice teachers can begin to recognize what basic education students should know and be able to do. Further, the examination process defines for them how the planned courses, as built on the standards, help determine the spiraling curriculum. According to Wiggins and McTighe (1998, p. 135),

> The idea of the curriculum as a spiral is that big ideas, important tasks, and ever-deepening inquiry must recur, in ever-increasing complexity and through engaging problems and sophisticated applications if students are to understand them.

In the same manner, preservice teachers need to read the state standards in given content areas. By reading the standards, they are better able to communicate/prepare and recognize what concepts need emphasis *during* the process of teaching. Further, by reading and becoming aware of the state standards, they will be able to improve their own teaching because they know what is valued according to that particular state. Resistance to the educational standards should also be communicated. According to Labaree (2000, p. 33), "efforts to establish standards will have vastly different consequences for education depending on which approach we take." He expounds on the goals of standards and how different perspectives come into view. He points out how certain goals of standards are to improve learning while other goals make it difficult for students to accomplish academic success because of particular factors. Alfie Kohn (2001, p 4.) further reiterates his support for the recognition of the standards as being "guidelines" versus "mandates." His concerns are also imbued that "in the pursuit of higher test scores, too many educators are ratcheting up the difficulty level for students without improving their own pedagogy." Preservice teachers need to know about the issues that surround the educational standards and be able to articulate the concepts, engage in meaningful discussion, and begin to assess their own philosophies about ways of implementing their state's educational standards. Preservice teachers have to recognize that "the focus of standard-based reform must be student learning and achievement" (Kendall, 2000, p. 4) and they need to recognize the pros/cons of the standards-based reform.

Experience Ways to Apply the Standards

"The one indispensable part of any teacher preparation program is field experience" (Posner, 1993, p. 3). Teacher preparation institutions have various clinical situations that their preservice teachers undergo as an orientation to the profession of teaching. This may occur from the

freshmen year to the senior year...depending on the institution of higher learning. Nevertheless, these critical times must be considered priorities, and because of the variations, it must still be recognized that preservice teachers are cognizant of "SIP-- Standards in Practice" (Sandham, 2001, p. 63). Are the standards being reviewed in preservice teachers' portfolios as they undertake their field experiences? Are preservice teachers discussing with their experienced teachers (during their field experiences) the standards determined by that particular state? If forty-seven states already have established standards for the four core subject areas (Elliot, 1996; Orlofsky & Olson, 2001), preservice teachers need to know how schools and teachers are being held accountable for student performance. Preservice teachers need to know how to retrieve the standards (from a particular department of education website) and become confident in the usage of the standards. If they are to teach lessons, are their lessons aligned with that state's standards? Only when teachers in training are aware of the role that standards play in accountability will change begin to occur for improving teacher quality and confidence emerge in using the standards "to escalate expectations" (Monroe, 2001, p. 1) for all learners to experience success.

Become Confident in the Usage of Standards

There are many possibilities for preservice teachers to consider ways to use the standards. First, they need to be encouraged and required to integrate the standards in their university requirements. Besides reading about standards, preparing lessons plans, and developing thematic units, they should be involved in group discussions and required projects. This provides them with ideas about using standards. Perhaps preservice teachers should be required to develop a rubric aligned for a particular grade level's suggested standards. This approach can lead to preservice teachers having a more personally invested method of becoming conscious about usage of the

standards. Another method is a "Bring and Brag" where preservice teachers design or develop a student project aligned to the state standards. Preservice teachers then would share their projects and tell how the lesson objective was aligned to that particular state's standard(s). Only when preservice teachers see, observe, and share are they experiencing ways to apply the standards. These teachers-in-training should recognize that state standards are a baseline, and that they have opportunities to take classroom students beyond. Preservice teachers need to learn that the purpose of applying the standards is not in the written words they may have in their plans or thematic units, but in the actions taken to apply the state standards.

Recognize How to Evaluate Student Progress Using a Standards-Based

Approach

Teachers-in-training should understand the standards for evaluation purposes. To obtain the meaning of the standards, although somewhat confusing, practice is needed "in aligning standards, assessment, and instruction with a learner-centered focus" (Colby, 1999, 53). This may begin when the preservice teacher is student teaching and has the benefit an experienced teacher. Hopefully, training occurred at the district level for the experienced teachers to assist the learning teacher and to be able to share that knowledge base. Susan Colby (1999, p. 52-53) encourages educators to ask these questions when establishing a grading system based on standards:

- Do the standards embody the skills and knowledge students need to have?
- Are the standards written with a focus on what the learner will do?
- Are they measurable?
- Do they provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students?
- Are teachers consistently using standards to guide classroom instruction?
- Are assessments purposefully aligned with standards and instruction?

Preservice teachers need to recognize the connections of curriculum, instruction and assessment while incorporating the standards. Are varied forms of assessment being implemented? Do preservice teachers, particularly during student teaching, develop grids, keep tallies, and make conscious efforts of assessment to benefit learning for all students as well as measure how the standards were met? Do they have the documented proof of how assessment occurred to help students reach proficiency? Often preservice or student teachers have the illusion because they taught it, classroom students must have learned it.

What do preservice teachers do if proficiency in learning does not occur? Are they aware of how to plot student learning so they know what was learned and what needs to be re-taught? Are they consciously examining artifacts from the learners to determine the patterns that are emerging from the assessment instruments? Often, unless required, preservice teachers will not recognize how to focus on the results and further analyze them in depth. According to Guskey (2001, p. 26):

> The best tests and assessments facilitate students' learning by providing essential feedback about their learning progress, helping them identify their learning problems, and offering guidance and direction for correcting those problems.

Further, as one administrator states "teachers who do not fully understand the standards cannot be expected to meet expectations in the classroom..." (Painter, 2001, p. 33).

CONCLUSION

For better or for worse, standards are part of the American classroom. Preservice teachers should recognize that the content standards, as developed by most states in the United States in the major subject areas, describes what K-12 students should be able to accomplish. Preservice

teachers need to recognize they need the conceptual framework and other competencies for helping classroom students achieve, attain, and surpass the content standards. They need to acquire the knowledge base about the modern standards movement and effectively communicate the importance of the standards while continuously becoming confident in the usage of the standards. They need to experiment and document with various forms of assessment realizing the use of assessments as "learning tools" for the instructional process and not only to "document" student progress (Guskey, 2001, p. 28). Only when preservice teachers have demonstrated the knowledge and skills of the aforementioned will confidence and an intense consciousness emerge about the expectations and demands needed for teaching in a standards-based classroom.

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